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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 10th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. HAMBURGER (Netherlands)

later : Mr. DJABBARY (Islamic Republic of Iran)
(Vice-Chairman)

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 97 : ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (A/51/3 (Part II), A/51/87, A/51/131, A/51/208-S/1996/543, A/51/210, A/51/211-S/1996/551, A/51/295, A/51/357, A/51/462-S/1996/831 and A/51/375)

(c) IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY (A/51/312)

(d) IMPLEMENTATION OF THE OUTCOME OF THE GLOBAL CONFERENCE ON THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES (A/51/354)

(e) PROTECTION OF GLOBAL CLIMATE FOR PRESENT AND FUTURE GENERATIONS OF MANKIND (A/51/484)

(f) INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR NATURAL DISASTER REDUCTION (A/51/186-E/1996/80)

1. Mr. DESAI (Under-Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development) introduced the report of the Secretary-General on action taken at the international, regional and national levels to implement the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (A/52/354) and the report of the Secretary-General and the programme budget for the biennium 1996-1997 in respect of the protection of global climate for present and future generations of mankind (A/51/484). The sub-item relating to small island developing States and the sub-item concerning the protection of global climate were closely interrelated since one of the major consequences of changes in the global climate could be rising levels of the sea, which would have disastrous effects for the small island developing States.

2. Referring to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, he noted that as its first session, the Conference of the Parties had adopted the Berlin Mandate, which had assumed great importance, as demonstrated at the second session of the Conference of the Parties held recently in Geneva. One of the results of the second session of the Conference of the Parties was the Geneva Ministerial Declaration, which provided important guidelines for the negotiators for the pursuit of mandatory objectives with regard to the overall limitation and reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

3. Another important outcome of the second session of the Conference of the Parties was the decision to establish guidelines for national communications from Parties not included in annex I of the Convention, which were basically developing countries. That decision enabled such countries to participate fully in the Conference process through the preparation of reports relating not only to greenhouse gas emissions but also to policies which they were pursuing or wished to pursue for which they required financial and technical assistance. It was planned that in time the national communications would become a basis for the provision of financial support.

4. With regard to the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, it should be noted that the Commission on Sustainable Development had considered various specific thematic areas in 1994. Updated information on measures taken since 1995 was included in the report on action taken to implement the Programme of Action (A/51/354). The report should

be considered in the context of all the reports prepared for the follow-up to the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island States held in Barbados in 1994.

5. Mr. FAREED (Department of Humanitarian Affairs) introduced the report of the Secretary-General on the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (A/51/186-E/1996/80). The Decade had begun in 1990 with the aim of preventing and reducing the effects of natural disasters through improved information on disasters. That objective continued to be relevant, since hurricanes, floods and earthquakes continued to affect the lives of millions of people throughout the world. Natural disasters caused serious loss of human life and hampered economic growth and sustainable development. The secretariat of the Decade had focused on implementing the Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action adopted at the World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction, which, inter alia, called for a closer linkage between disaster reduction and sustainable development.

6. The secretariat for the Decade was endeavouring to achieve the objectives of the Decade and provide decisive, complementary support for the coordinated provision of humanitarian assistance. In order for the Department of Humanitarian Affairs to be able to continue to ensure the activities of the secretariat for the Decade, it would require greater support from donors and more active participation on the part of all the national committees and coordination centres.

7. The secretariat for the Decade had made efforts to promote broad regional and subregional mechanisms for the effective reduction of natural disasters within the framework of sustainable development strategies. Since the World Conference, three subregional practical courses had been held in Africa with the aim of studying vulnerability to natural disasters and the risks which disasters entailed and preparing proposals for specific disaster reduction activities. In September, the Government of Italy had sponsored an international practical course on natural disaster reduction in the Mediterranean region, in which participants from countries of the region, the United Nations system, intergovernmental organizations, scientific institutions and private sector bodies agreed to prepare a specific strategy for natural disaster reduction in the region.

8. In accordance with the General Assembly's initiative to improve the early-warning capacity with respect to natural disasters, a broad analysis of such capacity was being carried out with the aim of identifying shortcomings in the existing early-warning systems and devising a strategy for improving them. Guided by the Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action and the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of the Small Island Developing Countries, the secretariat for the Decade was working to guarantee coordination of follow-up activities to those two initiatives.

9. The process aimed at the final appraisal of the Decade in 1999 must be productive and effective. Advantage would be taken of the experience of the United Nations system and knowledge and capacities available outside the Organization. Local groups, scientific bodies, private companies, public officials and civil servants should participate in the process. The final appraisal of the Decade should clearly show the achievements of the Decade and the efforts made to reduce natural disasters, especially at the local and

national levels. On that basis, the international community could prepare a strategy for a safer world in the twenty-first century, as called for at the World Conference for Natural Disaster Reduction. The Department of Humanitarian Affairs would strive to contribute to the achievement of that objective.

10. Ms. DENGO (Costa Rica), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said it was regrettable that the measures in pursuance of the Barbados Programme of Action had been taken primarily at the regional and national levels, and urged the international community to honour its commitments with regard to the sustainable development of the small island developing States.

11. With regard to the protection of global climate, she noted with satisfaction the adoption of the Ministerial Declaration at the second session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The second assessment report of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Climate Change provided a scientific basis for urgent action to strengthen the measures at the global, regional and national levels, in particular action by the Parties included in annex I.

12. Annex I parties' national communications should encompass two major components: on the one hand, commitments related to limiting or reducing greenhouse emissions and related policies and measures, as provided for in the Convention and the Berlin Mandate, and on the other hand, commitments related to financial resources and technology transfer.

13. It should be recalled that the largest share of historical and current global emissions of greenhouse gases originated in the developed countries. It was a matter of concern that the results of the review of the first national communications of annex I parties pointed out that the countries with higher emissions of greenhouse gases expected their emissions by the year 2000 to be above their 1990 levels. It was clear that the developed countries were falling short of their commitments to stabilize greenhouse emissions and were evading their responsibilities under article 4.2 of the Convention.

14. Furthermore, the Group of 77 and China considered that developed countries also fell short of their commitments regarding technology transfer and the provision of financial resources. Technology transfer, which was of crucial importance for the developing countries, should focus on the building of their endogenous capacity, in order to facilitate the optimal transferability of technology, its adequate absorption and its practical applicability.

15. With regard to the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, the most critical needs of the developing countries were based on certain common grounds. First and foremost, there must be agreement among policy makers that disaster reduction was an investment in the protection of national assets. Secondly, the international community's commitments during the Decade must be translated into concrete support through the provision of adequate human and financial resources. Lastly, equitable access to protection from natural disaster must be ensured for all, in both developing and developed countries.

16. General Assembly resolution 49/22 A provided the mechanism to initiate the process of international coordination towards the evaluation of the Decade's success and the options for sustained natural disaster reduction activities in

the future. The relationships and responsibilities for future natural disaster reduction must be reviewed in the context of the efforts to restructure and revitalize the United Nations in the economic, social and related fields. It would also be important to ask the Secretary-General to include in his report on the Decade to the fifty-second session of the General Assembly concrete proposals for ensuring the performance capability of the secretariat of the Decade to bring it to a successful conclusion by 1999.

17. The closing event of the Decade should take into consideration the findings of the World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction of May 1994 and the resulting Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action. It was important to highlight the coordinated approaches being taken by the United Nations to implement global action plans in the context of the evaluation and overall review of Agenda 21. The implementation of the Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action would have to take due account of such coordinated approaches.

18. Paragraph 10 of the Secretary-General's report on the Decade (A/51/186-E/1996/80) referred to natural hazards as having an intrinsic relationship with human-induced phenomena, such as technological or ecological conditions, which had an adverse impact on the environment. In that context, it was worth reaffirming the importance of having technology transfer linked to early-warning capacities to mitigate natural disasters in developing countries, under the auspices of the United Nations and the Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action.

19. The time had come to consolidate the progress achieved in natural disaster reduction and link it firmly with economic and social development. For the developing countries, international cooperation on disaster reduction contributed to the achievement of sustained economic growth and sustainable development.

20. With respect to the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Group of 77 and China wished to reiterate that the Convention must be inserted within the framework of a new model of sustainable economic development, since that was perhaps the only way to resolve the existing paradox between the economic growth and development of developing countries and the conservation of the environment and natural resources.

21. Technology transfer could not be accomplished by simply providing information on the technologies currently available on the market. The solution was to ensure that such transfer had been effectively made by the developed countries to the developing countries in accordance with articles 16, 17 and 18 of the Convention. Paradoxically, access and transfer of technologies could represent a heavy burden for the developing countries if there were no adequate mechanisms to protect the intellectual property rights of farmers and indigenous people and the traditional lifestyles of local communities, and if the equitable and appropriate distribution of benefits arising from the use of genetic resources was not ensured. It was essential to recognize that one of the important components of biodiversity was the eradication of poverty, which remained crucial to sustainable development and the conservation of biological resources through collaborative global action.

22. The Group of 77 and China took note of the work programme approved at the second Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, held

in Jakarta in 1995, and welcomed the mandate on marine biological diversity adopted at the Conference, since many members of the Group of 77 had a particular interest in the matter. The full implementation of the provisions of the Convention on Biological Diversity would constitute an essential element in reconciling the need for reactivation of economic growth and the promotion of sustainable use and conservation of the developing countries' natural resources.

23. Mr. FAREED (Director of the New York Office, Department of Humanitarian Affairs), in reply to the remarks made by the representative of Costa Rica, said that he was convinced that the activities of the secretariat of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction would be completed by 1999, after which the Governments would have to decide how to proceed. In order to achieve significant results by 1999, the importance of national committees, to which the representative of Costa Rica had not referred in her statement, should be stressed. Those committees could help draw attention to areas in which the United Nations could provide assistance to countries to enhance their capacity to deal with or prevent disasters. In general, Governments had not paid much attention to the key role of national committees. He urged all Governments to support the activities relating to the Decade so that the Department of humanitarian Affairs would not have to spend too much time in an effort to mobilize resources.

24. Mr. MURPHY (Ireland), speaking on behalf of the countries members of the European Union, which had been joined by Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Iceland, Latvia, Malta, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, said that the four sub-items being considered at the current meeting derived largely from the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, and were clearly interlinked; the consideration of those sub-items would be more relevant if such cross-linkages were born in mind.

25. With regard to the Convention on Biological Diversity, the development and implementation of national strategies, plans and programmes in accordance with article 6 of the Convention were of particular importance. Continuing the international dialogue on the issues of conservation and sustainable use of coastal and marine biodiversity and agricultural biological diversity was also very important, since both issues were essential to food security, which was the focus of the forthcoming World Food Summit; the work being undertaken by the Intergovernmental Panel on forests was likewise crucial to that discussion. Genetic resources were of vital importance to current and future generations and solutions must be found regarding access to such resources.

26. The outcome of the first meeting of the Open-ended Ad Hoc Working Group of Experts on Biosafety, held in Aarhus, Denmark, in July 1996, was encouraging. That process should be promoted; to that end, the third meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, to be held in Buenos Aires in early November 1996, should adopt effective arrangements for the Group's future work. Lastly, he reaffirmed the desirability of designating the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to operate the financial mechanism on a permanent basis.

27. With regard to the outcome of the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, he drew attention to the relevant

report of the Secretary-General (A/51/354), which summarized the extensive discussion held on the question by the Commission on Sustainable Development at its fourth session, in 1996; while the report was generally satisfactory, the chapter entitled "Progress in national implementation" was rather brief. He took note of the report's conclusion that it would be important for the authorities of small island developing States to provide information on all their major activities under the Programme of Action, and expressed the Union's willingness to provide assistance to the relevant international organizations in that regard. He also supported the recommendations for future action contained in the report.

28. With regard to the protection of the global climate, the second session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, held in July, had made real progress in several areas, as evidenced by the Ministerial Declaration issued at the close of the session. In the Union's view, the most important achievements of the session had been the recognition and endorsement of the validity of the second assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the agreement that it should provide a scientific basis for future action; the acknowledgement of the considerable work done by the Ad Hoc Group on the Berlin Mandate; the appeal to all Parties to submit proposals in order to facilitate the negotiations beginning at the Group's next meeting in December; and the decision to instruct delegations to conclude negotiations on a legally binding protocol or another legal instrument in time for its adoption at the third session of the Conference of the Parties, to be held in Kyoto, Japan, in December 1997. Such an instrument should, in particular, include commitments by Annex I Parties regarding quantified legally binding objectives for emission limitations and significant overall reductions of greenhouse gases not controlled by the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer.

29. The GEF should be the permanent financial mechanism for the Framework Convention. Strengthened efforts by Annex I Parties alone would not be sufficient to control climate change; that would require the participation of all Parties, based on a closer partnership between developed and developing countries which, for their part, should seek to produce and use more energy-efficient and lower carbon-emitting technologies and products.

30. With regard to the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, he welcomed the substantial discussion held on the question at the 1996 substantive session of the Economic and Social Council, and drew attention to the statement made by the Union on that occasion. In the context of integrated approaches to sustainable development, two areas of the International Decade were of particular interest, namely, the development and strengthening of early-warning capacities, as called for in General Assembly resolutions 49/22 B and 50/117 B, and the development of comprehensive regional and subregional frameworks for disaster reduction. The report of the Economic and Social Council (A/51/3, Part II) contained a resolution on the Decade Council (resolution 1996/45), which had been adopted by consensus. The General Assembly should not duplicate either the Council's debate or its resolution. A more comprehensive overview of Decade activities would be provided in the regular biennial report on the Decade to be submitted to the Assembly at its fifty-second session.

31. Ms. WILLIAMS-MANIGAULT (United States of America) said that much had been accomplished since the Rio Conference in 1992 with regard to the issues facing small island developing States. The goals of her Government's international oceans policy were clear. Her country had provided new and additional financial resources to the GEF and had worked to ensure that the Facility addressed critical issues affecting the marine environment, as set out in chapter 17 of Agenda 21. Good results could be achieved by seeking to maximize the effectiveness of United Nations programmes. The International Coral Reef Initiative, which had promoted a more comprehensive strategy on coral reefs based on innovative partnerships and integrated financing at all levels, was a good example of what could be done.

32. Furthermore, attention should be given to the implementation of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities. Her government supported the adoption of the resolution put forward by the Economic and Social Council for the implementation of the Programme of Action; the resolution incorporated the Programme into the activities of organizations of the United Nations system and outlined the necessary institutional arrangements, and her Government called on its partners to promote real cooperation among those organizations so that all aspects of the Programme could be implemented. The existing resources were sufficient, and the initiative could serve as a model for inter-agency cooperation within the United Nations system on other issues which cut across traditional sectoral boundaries and agency mandates.

33. No other issue demonstrated the transnational character of current challenges better than global climate change. All nations were vulnerable to the effects of that phenomenon, and just as the causes and effects of climate change were global, so, too, must the solutions be. The General Assembly had adopted resolution 50/115 in support of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. It was regrettable that the Secretary-General's report, which should have provided more information concerning the nature and financial implications of the transitional arrangements for administrative support provided for in that resolution, had not been available in time for the current debate. She firmly believed that the permanent secretariats of the international conventions should be financed from contributions by the parties to those conventions; it was necessary to ensure that the United Nations regular budget remained within the spending limits for the next biennium, and that no unanticipated funding requirements had to be met at the expense of other priority programmes.

34. With regard to the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, her delegation was encouraged by the growth in the number and variety of initiatives in that area, particularly private sector activities. Initiatives at all levels to reduce natural disasters must be thoroughly integrated into sustainable development efforts. The United States urged the secretariat for the International Decade to coordinate fully its programmes within the United Nations system, and encouraged UNDP to integrate disaster reduction into its country programmes. The secretariat for the International Decade should use its closing event to focus on the integration of disaster reduction into national planning and to review the specific outcomes accomplished during the Decade.

35. Mr. FAREED (Director, New York Office, Department of Humanitarian Affairs) agreed with many of the comments made by the United States delegation and said that it would indeed be desirable to integrate activities relating to the International Decade into national development programmes, but responsibility in that regard did not lie exclusively with UNDP and the United Nations, but with countries themselves. He noted the comments made and would take them into account during the final review of the Decade.

36. Mrs. ILES (Trinidad and Tobago), speaking on behalf of the 31 member countries of the Alliance of Small Island States, fully endorsed the statement made by the representative of Costa Rica, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, on the issues before the Committee.

37. The Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States had given international recognition to the special situation of small island developing States and to the vulnerability of such countries, and had represented a commitment, on behalf of the international community and the United Nations system, to support such States in their efforts to attain sustainable development, in the context of the implementation of Agenda 21. However, two years after the convening of the Barbados Conference, that commitment had not produced any tangible assistance, for various reasons. For the commitment to become a reality, it was necessary to examine the place that the Barbados Programme of Action had in the formulation of national policies and programmes for sustainable development and resource management in small island States, together with action to incorporate the Programme in collaborative efforts at the subregional and regional levels. There was also a need to review the commitment by donor countries and multilateral organizations to assist in the implementation of the Programme of Action, and the role and functions of the Department of Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development, specifically its Small Island Developing States Unit, as an active agent for the promotion and implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action.

38. The Alliance of Small Island States invited its developed country partners, the United Nations Secretariat and the wider United Nations system to engage in discussion of all those issues in the context of the review of the implementation of Agenda 21 to take place in 1997. For a significant number of member countries of the Alliance, the Barbados Programme of Action constituted their prescription for the implementation of Agenda 21. It was their hope that the deliberations to take place in 1997 and at the special session of the General Assembly on the implementation of Agenda 21 would strengthen the international response for the full and effective implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action.

39. She could not fail to refer to climate change, the issue which had brought the Alliance into existence and to which it continued to attach the highest priority. The second assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change gave new urgency to the need for substantial additional commitments by the industrialized countries to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. It should be noted that the ministerial declaration which had emanated from the second session of the Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change had recognized and endorsed that report as the most comprehensive and authoritative assessment of climate change. In 1994 the Alliance had submitted a draft protocol to the Convention aimed at

strengthening the commitments of Annex I Parties - the only complete proposal so far submitted.

40. The Alliance was concerned about the pace of the negotiations being held in the Ad Hoc Group on the Berlin Mandate, since there was still no agreement in sight on basic issues and there was little time before the third session of the Conference of Parties, at which a protocol or other legal instrument would need to be adopted to strengthen the Annex I commitments, as required by the Berlin Mandate. The Alliance therefore repeated the call, made at the second session of the Conference of Parties, for the acceleration of the current negotiations and the submission of texts for consideration at the forthcoming session of the Ad Hoc Group on the Berlin Mandate. The second assessment report on climate change confirmed the fears of the member countries of the Alliance. The projected change in climate would be especially damaging to small island developing States. However, that did not make climate change a problem of the small island States, since it had very serious implications for all States. She appealed to all States to act in concert with the urgency and decisiveness that the situation demanded.

41. Mr. PANKIN (Russian Federation) said that his delegation was of the view that the second assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change did not contain enough information to be able to take concerted political action in the area of climate change, and that it did not provide an answer to an extremely important question referred to in article 2 of the Framework Convention on Climate change, namely that of stabilizing the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere so as to avert any dangerous anthropogenic impact on the climate system. There was an urgent need to conduct a comprehensive scientific study on the levels of concentration of gases that posed a danger. The Russian Federation would not exceed in the year 2000 the levels of greenhouse gases reached in 1990, but remained concerned about the situation in other countries that were having difficulties in meeting their commitments.

42. In order to develop joint measures in accordance with the Convention and promote the participation of all countries in reaching its goals, he suggested exploring the possibility of creating additional mechanisms to stimulate the involvement of all actors, including the private sector, in the transfer of environmentally sound technologies and in the financing of activities. If in the near future an assessment, even preliminary, of the danger level for the climate system was successfully concluded, it would be easier to adopt a political decision regarding quantitative targets on reduction and elimination of greenhouse gases and to consider the outline of a protocol or other legal document containing the obligations of the parties to the Convention beyond the year 2000.

43. He reiterated his delegation's proposal regarding article 13 of the Framework Convention on the multilateral consultative process, namely, to establish a subsidiary body to solve problems experienced by countries. He hoped that, prior to the third Conference of the Parties, energetic efforts could be taken to find solutions to several outstanding issues related to the functioning of the mechanisms of the Convention and the implementation of its objectives. His delegation was fully committed to participating in a

constructive manner in those negotiations, which required maximum transparency, correctness and understanding among participants.

44. His delegation shared the view that technological innovations and commercial opportunities played an increasing role in efforts to find an effective response to natural disasters. Increased utilization of modern telecommunications and information technologies could be achieved through wider access for all interested countries, reasonable rates for relevant services and the establishment of a global early-warning system. His delegation supported and was prepared to take part in intergovernmental consultations on the elaboration of an international convention on the coordinated use of telecommunications in disaster mitigation.

45. His delegation supported the strengthening of institutions and mechanisms for preventing and mitigating natural disasters within the framework of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and promoted comprehensive bilateral and multilateral agreements to that end. The establishment of a new Special High-level Council would make it possible to achieve two objectives, namely, the promotion of high-profile funding initiatives and sustained political commitment on a global scale. His delegation was satisfied with the activities of the Geneva Contact Group and supported the suggestion to establish a similar mechanism in New York.

46. The closing event of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction should carry out an overall review of the accomplishments of the Decade and establish an international institutional structure to coordinate work in natural disaster reduction. It was necessary to reach agreement on the effective organization of the preparatory process for that institutional structure.

47. Mr. Djabbary (Islamic Republic of Iran), Vice-President, took the Chair.

48. Mr. FAREED (Department of Humanitarian Affairs) said that work was being conducted on the two proposals mentioned by the representative of the Russian Federation, namely, the Contact Group and the Special High-level Council. However, those initiatives required substantial financial resources, which was why the desired goal had not yet been reached.

49. Mr. ISLAM (Bangladesh) said that natural disasters affected all countries irrespective of their stage of development. Some parts of the world were more prone than others to specific types of natural disasters, which could take a significant toll in human lives and cause considerable damage to property and infrastructure. When the infrastructure was rudimentary or suffered extensive damage, providing relief to victims became a nightmare. Rehabilitation was impossible when a country's resources were limited. The effects on countries with small economies were crippling, and those countries suffered most owing to their limited capacity to respond to emergencies. Bangladesh was often subjected to floods during the monsoon season, and the densely populated coastal areas often had to bear the brunt of cyclones. The ecological damage to forests in the north of the country had reduced the water-retaining capacity of river basins, thus increasing vulnerability of the lower riparian region to floods. Similarly, the diminution of coastal forests had made localities in the coastal area more vulnerable to cyclones. Since 1987, Bangladesh had suffered two major

floods and a severe cyclone. Nevertheless, it was currently possible to reduce damage to life and property significantly by a combination of early-warning systems, better disaster-preparedness, training and experience in mitigating disasters and their aftermath, timely assistance and effective rehabilitation. That had enabled Bangladesh to overcome disasters without seeking external assistance.

50. The indigenous capacity of disaster-prone developing countries must be increased in order to enable them to deal with natural disasters in an effective manner. The United Nations could help such countries by developing disaster-mitigation programmes and early-warning systems. Bangladesh was prepared to share its experience with other disaster-prone countries and with United Nations agencies. Any delay in assistance could cause many otherwise preventable deaths. The prompt dispatch of United nations disaster-assessment and standby teams was therefore crucial. Coordination of United Nations emergency relief assistance was more effective if it was synchronized with national relief efforts that took into account individual countries' needs and priorities. That could be ensured through the proper integration of United Nations relief operations with those mounted by national authorities.

51. The international community should ensure that the programmes of the Decade were not hampered by a lack of resources. The experience of Bangladesh had shown that strengthening national and local capacities for pre-disaster preparedness was much more cost-effective than investing solely in post-disaster relief. His delegation believed that a sustained effort should be made to strengthen the capacities of vulnerable countries by promoting the transfer of technology and exchange of information.

52. Mr. FAREED (Department of Humanitarian Affairs) said that relief teams usually arrived at their destination within 24 to 48 hours, depending on the place and the distance. Between $30,000 and $50,000 were currently being provided to Governments to strengthen their coordination capacity; in other words, the united Nations did not coordinate the response to disasters but allowed Governments to coordinate resources, and sought to ensure that information relating to the assessment was disseminated to the international community so that those who wished to contribute to the relief effort could do so. It was difficult to obtain funding for preventive measures since, unfortunately, it was easier to request resources to mitigate the effects of disasters than to interest donors and Governments in investing in disaster-prevention activities.

53. Mr. RONNEBERG (Marshall Islands), speaking as the Chairman of the South Pacific Forum, said, with regard to the Convention on Biological Diversity, that marine biodiversity should be given higher priority. The Forum had called upon the United Nations Environment Programme and the Global Environment Facility to extend the funding period for the South Pacific Biodiversity Conservation Programme to provide adequate time for community-based conservation activities to build effective structures for the implementation of that programme by involving all sectors concerned.

54. Regarding the implementation of the outcome of the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, the joint report on regional activities submitted by the South Pacific Regional Environment

Programme and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, although a regional report, took into account many of the national initiatives and projects under way in the region. The lack of separate national reports from some of the countries in the region did not mean that they were not participating in the follow-up activities to the Barbados Programme of Action. There was a great deal of activity at the regional and national levels, although the Pacific island countries were working within severe financial constraints. He called on the international community to renew its efforts in the implementation of that comprehensive sustainable development strategy for the small island developing States.

55. Turning to protection of the global climate, he said that climate change was a global problem that required a global solution. The Forum had called for urgent action in view of the Second Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which stated that scientific evidence suggested a discernible human influence on the global climate. The countries of the South Pacific Forum called on the international community to accelerate negotiations on the text of a legally binding protocol to the Framework Convention on Climate Change or other legal instrument for adoption at the next Conference of the Parties. The international community must achieve significant progress towards the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in the near future. The survival of many small island developing States, as well as many other developing States which were affected in some way by climate change, depended on such action. Climate change would adversely affect everyone; thus, his delegation reaffirmed its full support for the inclusion of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) protocol in the discussions of the Ad Hoc Group on the Berlin Mandate.

56. His delegation wished to make it abundantly clear that it was not satisfied with certain aspects of the Framework Convention on Climate Change process. It was absolutely appalled that, after two sessions of the Conference of the Parties, the rules of procedures had still not been adopted. The current situation, where a small minority of countries with vested interests had been allowed to obstruct the entire proceedings with their spurious arguments, was unacceptable. The decision to allocate a seat on the Bureau of the Conference of Parties for the small island developing States had been approved by the Group of 77 and China before being brought before the Conference of the Parties itself, and had commanded unanimous support at that time. To return to the issue and tie acceptance of the seat for the small island developing States to the overall adoption of the rules meant that the interests of all developing countries were being undermined by questioning their solidarity. It was in the interests of all developing countries to have a Conference that functioned properly.

57. All the scenarios and indicators put forward in the Second assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change were very bad omens for the developing countries. His delegation wished to stress that point and to urge the silent majority of countries concerned to take the necessary measures to achieve real progress. Action was being impeded by the attitudes and policies of some developed countries which believed that the measures that must be adopted would entail excessive costs, and that it was more appropriate for reductions in greenhouse gas emissions to be made by the developing countries. If the countries in annex I could not find any other solution regarding their reductions of greenhouse gas emissions, he proposed that they should implement

the solution contained in the AOSIS protocol - a 20 per cent reduction across the board.

58. With reference to the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, the countries of the Pacific region had expressed growing concern over the increased intensity and frequency of storms and typhoons in the region, with an impact that would continue to stretch their limited resources. International assistance was required to make regional activities more efficient.

59. Ms. EDWARDS (Canada) said that the first World Conservation Congress currently under way in Montreal was evidence of the global community's continued commitment to sustainable development. The World Conservation Union had attracted more that 2,500 delegates for the largest environmental meeting since UNCED. Those delegates represented Governments and all major groups, since it was understood that sustainable development policies and practices were the responsibility of society as a whole. It was clear that transparent, inclusive processes were necessary for lasting achievements. Canada believed that the same approach should be followed for the Special Session of the General Assembly on the implementation of Agenda 21. All of civil society, including the major groups identified in Agenda 21, should have a recognized place in its proceedings.

60. Forests were a priority for Canada. As the world's largest exporter of forest products, it would like to see the development of non-discriminatory and multilaterally agreed rules for trade and sustainable forest management. Canada would continue to promote a definition of sustainable forest management that would accommodate the variations existing among various forest ecosystems and practices. It strongly supported efforts to develop and apply criteria for and indicators of sustainable management of forests and the coherent and coordinated development and implementation of national forest and land-use plans. Such plans were the most appropriate way to achieve sustainable forest management and to enable the participation of all stake-holders, including indigenous people, local communities and forest dwellers. By the same token, Canada believed that the greater use of traditional knowledge in sustainable forest management could improve management practices.

61. She emphasized the importance of the work of the Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Panel on Forests, which would lay the foundations for building on the Intergovernmental Panel's activities in five key areas: provision of clear and comprehensive directions to international organizations and instruments dealing with forests; setting of common priorities; regular measuring of collective progress towards sustainable forest management; creation of an independent high-level political forum to provide governance on forest issues; and participation of all interested parties. In addition to extending the current mandate of the Intergovernmental Panel, a legally binding instrument should be established to deal with forest issues and avoid further fragmentation of those issues among a growing number of international bodies.

62. Canada also remained committed to making progress on the issue of sustainable management of the oceans, which should be considered at the forthcoming special session of the General Assembly. The international community should focus more attention on the management and sustainable development of coastal zones. In particular, there was a need to focus on the land-based

sources of marine pollution and to follow-up on the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the marine Environment from Land-based Activities, and also to develop regional and national programmes of action. It was important to build on the progress made since the Rio Conference in protecting the fisheries resources on the high seas through the conclusion of the Agreement for the Implementation of the Provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982 relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks.

63. One of the most significant environmental concerns in the Arctic was contamination caused by persistent organic pollutants that migrated by air and water from other parts of the world. That problem already illustrated the need for continued global cooperation to address that and other chemical safety issues. Canada had played a very active role in the development of a protocol on persistent organic pollutants within the framework of the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution. It had also been active in the work of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in that area.

64. Canada, which would host the second meeting of the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety in February 1997, advocated the successful conclusion in 1997 of the negotiations sponsored by UNEP and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) with a view to developing an instrument for applying prior informed consent procedures to trade in certain hazardous chemicals.

65. Her delegation noted the continued progress on other aspects of the international sustainable development agenda and said that Montreal had been chosen as the location of the permanent secretariat for the Convention on Biological Diversity. With regard to the preservation of biodiversity, in 1996 the Government of Canada had set aside more than 60,000 square kilometres for new national parks. Canadian provincial and territorial Governments had agreed in principle to establish a national framework for the protection of endangered species, and there would soon be a federal initiative for the same purpose.

66. Canada had also played an active role in the negotiations that had led to the adoption of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification. Particularly in Africa. Her Government had submitted an official offer to host the permanent secretariat for that Convention in Montreal.

67. With regard to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, she said that Canada had chaired the negotiations that had led to the ministerial declaration of the second session of the Conference of the Parties in July 1996. That Declaration reflected the widely held view that negotiations should be accelerated on the text of a protocol or other legal instrument to be completed by the third session of the Conference of the Parties, which would be held in Japan in 1997.

68. In the coming months, Canada would continue to promote action in favour of sustainable development at various important regional and global meetings, and it was committed to cooperating for the achievement of satisfactory results at the forthcoming special session of the General Assembly on the implementation of Agenda 21. Her Government would work with determination to mobilize the

political will needed to achieve progress towards the goal of sustainable development.

69. Mr. WAHBI (Saudi Arabia) emphasized the importance of continuing the process of economic and social development, which enabled countries to increase production in all areas of their economic activity. Such an increase in production, which made it possible to improve people's quality of life, was often accompanied by an increase in consumption which, in turn, had a negative impact on the quality of the environment. Development planning should therefore take account of the need to protect the biological balance of terrestrial and marine resources.

70. In an era characterized by the desire to protect the environment and repair the damage that had been done to it, the United Nations had played a central role in formulating criteria for monitoring the negative effects of human activity on the environment, while at the same time promoting economic and social development in various parts of the world. That had resulted from decisions adopted at recent major international conferences, particularly the United nations Conference on Environment and Development, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Agenda 21, adopted at that Conference, had established criteria for addressing issues relating to environment and development, and the Commission of Sustainable Development had dealt with the relevant follow-up.

71. However, the monitoring measures that had been adopted would not improve the quality of the environment unless they were accompanied by a plan of action for the implementation of Agenda 21. The Rio Conference had provided for the holding of a special session of the General Assembly for the purpose of an overall review and appraisal of Agenda 21. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 47/190, the special session would be held in 1997. In that regard, it was important to define criteria for appraising the implementation of Agenda 21 and to formulate a programme of action to improve the quality of the environment and repair the damage that had been done to it.

72. Since environmental problems transcended national borders, a global appraisal should be undertaken with a view to reducing negative effects on the environment throughout the world. The international community could contribute to the implementation of the sustainable development programmes required for economic and social progress in the developing countries by providing financial and technical support to those countries and facilitating access to environmentally sound alternative technologies. The United Nations should undertake an information campaign in order to reduce consumption trends that damaged the environment and to change consumption patterns throughout the world.

73. Mr. SLADE (Samoa) said that his country's position was reflected in the statement delivered during the current session on behalf of the South Pacific Forum island Countries and in the statement delivered on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States. Samoa also supported the statement made by Costa Rica on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Samoa attached great importance to the implementation of the Programme of Action of the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States and expressed its satisfaction that the report of the Secretary-General on the question (A/51/354) took into account the activities undertaken at the regional and national level. Samoa recognized that it had primary responsibility for implementing the

Programme of Action at the national level. Action and cooperation at the regional level were also of paramount importance for small island developing States. In his Government's view, the effectiveness of those activities must be evaluated and the findings of the evaluation must be reflected in the reports on action taken to implement the Programme of Action.

74. The report of the Secretary-General described the action taken with a view to developing a vulnerability index for small island developing States. In that connection, his delegation wished to know whether any person or body was attempting to consolidate the results of that work in order to avoid duplication or reduce it to a minimum. Similarly, it wished to know what action had been taken to focus the proper attention on certain priority areas referred to in paragraph 65 of the report.

75. Turning to the question of climate change, he noted its significance for the Alliance of Small Island States, which had actively cooperated with the international community in that area. As indicated, the Alliance's Protocol was the only substantive proposal before the Ad Hoc Group on the Berlin Mandate. However, the report mentioned neither the role which the Alliance had played nor the initiatives it had undertaken to ensure that the international community took urgent action to consider the question of climate change. Negotiations must be accelerated in order to take final action on the Berlin Mandate. In that context, the Ministerial Declaration of the second session of the Conference of the parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change constituted an outstanding political commitment. The Ministerial Declaration highlighted, in particular, the conclusions of the second assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

76. In his delegation's view, due attention must be paid to the need to take urgent action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to stabilize concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere at levels well below those of the pr-industrial era. Moreover, negotiations should be accelerated on the text of a legally binding protocol or other legal instrument for adoption at the third session of the Conference of the Parties. On the basis of the estimates and projections of the second assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel, his delegation believed that the targets and timetable proposed in the Protocol of the Alliance of Small Island States remained credible and viable.

77. Mr. PEYREFITTE (Belize) supported the statement made by the representative of Costa Rica on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, and the statement made by the representative of Trinidad and Tobago on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States. Concerning the report on action taken at the international, regional and national levels to implement the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (A/52/354), he said that Belize, Guinea-Bissau and Guyana, which were members of the Alliance of Small Island States, should be included in the list of countries contained in annex I.

78. In his delegation's views, many of the problems of the low-lying coastal States were essentially identical to those of island States. That had been recognized in the Declaration and Programme of Action of the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. He stressed that much of the territory of Belize consisted of offshore islands and that a

substantial proportion of its municipalities were located offshore. Moreover, Belize City was so low and vulnerable that, in the disastrous wake of Hurricane Hattie in 1961, the capital had had to be moved inland to Belmopan.

79. Concerning the action taken at the international level referred to in the report, Belize was patiently awaiting the outcome of the project on the impact of climate change on Antigua and Barbuda. It also looked forward to the outcome of the project on the strengthening of the tide gauge network for the Global Oceanic Observation System among Caribbean small island developing States.

80. Concerning the implementation by the organization of American States (OAS) of a five-year disaster mitigation project in the Caribbean, funded by the United States Agency for International development (USAID), Belize believed that the concept of disaster should be understood as natural disaster, for if it was disaster caused by man, its prevention and not its mitigation should be encouraged. Belize supported the recommendations made to the General Assembly to endorse future action to implement the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, and also to promote the coordination of activities for the establishment of a vulnerability index.

81. Mr. OVIA (Papua New Guinea) said that his country continued to attach great importance to the unique needs of small island developing States and to the role of the United nations in strengthening linkages between the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States and the outcomes of other international conferences.

82. The report of the Secretary-General (A/52/354) while not exhaustive, provided a general overview of action taken by the United Nations system, the regional commissions and regional organizations such as the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme and the Global Environment Facility. Obviously, follow-up to the Barbados Programme of Action was rather slow, and most of the island developing States continued to face problems in that field that went beyond their financial and technical measure.

83. The drive and spirit that had developed between the United Nations Conference on environment and Development and the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States had ebbed somewhat, despite the strong commitment generated at the Global Conference with regard to international cooperation in critical areas, such as climate change and natural disaster reduction. Natural disasters, which brought devastation to the small island States in particular, also had a severe impact at the global level and required urgent action by the international community and the transfer of adequate technical and scientific knowledge. The Secretary-General noted that insufficient attention was being paid to priority areas of the Programme of Action, such as transport and communications, energy, science and technology, biodiversity, climate change and sea-level rise. Papua New Guinea requested adequate and tangible international support for those priority areas.

84. The Barbados Programme of Action was an excellent blueprint adopted by heads of Government, and its follow-up deserved strong political support. His delegation agreed with the recommendations formulated by the Secretary-General and would support a General Assembly resolution endorsing them in order to maintain the momentum in future activities of the United Nations system to

implement the Programme of Action. The Global Conference on Small Island Developing States was an integral part of the Agenda 21 process and was increasingly related to United Nations activities, within the framework of the international community's commitments and the conventions relating to environmental protection and sustainable development.

85. Mr. WATSON (World Bank) said that the links between economic development and the environment were becoming clearer every day. Although the key propositions laid out in the Bruntland Commission Report in 1987 and in Agenda 21 in 1992 had been controversial at the time, they were currently broadly accepted. However, such acceptance had not assured their effective implementation, although about 100 countries had prepared national environmental strategies, and tangible changes were apparent in about half of them.

86. Along with other international agencies, the World Bank had sought to help its client countries make development sustainable and, in the process, had increased its own understanding of ecological problems. Environmental and social specialists currently numbered over 300, and a series of operational policies on the environment had been put in place. The Bank's agenda was two-fold: to support countries as they sought to reform their environmental management, and to factor environmental concerns into all the World Bank's activities.

87. In attempting to reconcile economic development with environmental protection, a growing number of developing countries were trying to implement a "new environmentalism". The Bank's President, Mr. James Wolfensohn, had recently articulated the principles of that approach, which were increasingly reflected in the World Bank's lending for enhanced environmental management. The World Bank's environmental portfolio currently stood at $11.5 billion for 153 projects in 62 countries. The portfolio, which was unique in size and scope, was a living laboratory from which all could learn valuable lessons that would have to be distilled and factored into future programmes. Many environmental problems required regional or global solutions. The World Bank, as an implementing agency for the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and Montreal Protocol, and through its regular lending, was committed to implementing those global agreements and other regional environmental programmes.

88. As part of its biodiversity assistance strategy, the Bank supported biodiversity conservation and sustainable use through regular lending of client Governments and grant financing through GEF. The World Bank recognized that, to play an effective role in that area, it must integrate biodiversity conservation with economic development. To make its assistance more effective, the World Bank was building on existing partnerships with Governments, the private sector, other development agencies and non-governmental organizations.

89. The World Bank emphasized the importance of taking advantage of cost-effective opportunities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from a long-term global environmental perspective. In that context, the GEF Council had authorized $215 million for co-financing of the World Bank's renewable energy projects.

90. Evidence was growing that economic structural changes would affect future greenhouse gas emissions and that countries should pursue actions that also

captured climate change benefits. Agriculture, industry, energy and transport investments should be designed to take into account the reciprocal influences between such investments and climate change. Up to a point, domestic and global benefits were produced jointly, but at times the global risk of climate change warranted special measures. The Bank was helping countries integrate climate change concerns into policy-making and investment planning.

91. Mr. PHANIT (Thailand) said that his Government believed that protection of the global climate and conservation of biodiversity were of particular importance. With regard to the first issue, his country felt that the united Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, to which Thailand had become a party in 1995, could play an important role in protecting the climate. Although the progress made in implementing the Convention was encouraging, many tasks lay ahead. Specifically, his delegation wished to express its disappointment that no progress had been made in the implementation of article 4.5 of the Convention, which dealt with the transfer of, or access to, environmentally sound technologies.

92. The developed countries had yet to demonstrate their genuine will to fulfil their commitments and their seriousness in implementing measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to their 1990 levels by the year 2000. In that regard, Thailand felt that the establishment of a clearing house and roster of experts, as proposed at the second session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention, would be useful in the consideration of those issues.

93. Thailand was committed to the objectives of the Convention and was in the process of undertaking many measures towards meeting its commitments. His Government stood ready to cooperate with the developed countries in local projects to decrease greenhouse gases; it was also preparing an inventory of such emissions and proposals to reduce them. The government had set short- and medium-term targets and strategies for the development of its energy sector and had been the first Asian country to incorporate energy efficiency formally into its energy sector planning. In the transport sector, lead emissions had been reduced in recent years. Thailand had also conducted a number of research projects related to climate change, which would help to increase scientific understanding of the potential change and its impact on the country's natural resources and life-support systems.

94. With regard to the second issue, although Thailand was not yet ready to ratify the Convention on Biological Diversity, it recognized the great importance of conserving biological diversity and had taken steps to that end, including, for example, the establishment of protected areas in various parts of the country to combat the increasing loss of forest lands. The King and Queen of Thailand had been foremost among advocates of conservation of biological resources in Thailand, particularly in the efforts to address the underlying causes of deforestation, and had contributed to social awareness of the need to conserve the environment and utilize it prudently. Thailand had also co-hosted two recent international conferences on biodiversity, which had allowed for the exchange of technical know-how in the filed of biodiversity, and it had illustrated its willingness to cooperate with Governments, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations in activities relating to biodiversity conservation and environmental protection. His Government reaffirmed its commitment to protecting the global climate and conserving

biological diversity for present and future generations and felt that the international community should recognize that, to preserve the planet, global willingness to tackle the task was essential; if action was delayed, the cost could be devastating.

The meeting rose at 5.20 p.m.